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GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND.

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UTAH SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

Guide Dogs for the Blind

The general public commonly believes that the majority of blind persons travel with the assistance of a guide dog. To illustrate this point, a partially sighted friend who was recently traveling to Salt Lake for the national convention of the American Council of the Blind was asked by interested personnel in two consecutive airports why she did not have a dog. I'm sure that they were surprised when she answered very simply that she did not wish to have a dog.

The New York School of Social Work, an arm of Columbia University, conducted independent research for the Seeing Eye, Inc. They discovered that "somewhat less than 1% of the blind population were already using dogs at the time of the study, and findings indicated that not more than 1% additional blind people were physically, mentally, and emotionally qualified as guide dog users." If there are, in actuality, so few blind people who travel with the assistance of a guide dog, why do so many in society conjure an image of a blind man with a dog whenever blindness is discussed?

One possible explanation is that when a sighted person boards a bus and sees a large dog over which he must step, or enters a restaurant or department store and sees a person with a German Shepherd, a rather striking and lasting impression is made. The sighted person then often makes generalizations about all blind persons using dogs. A blind person with his cane between his feet or against his shoulder may go unnoticed on a bus; a blind person with his cane underneath his chair may blend in at a restaurant and go unnoticed. A blind person with a dog, however, is often more visible. Impressions are made and conclusions are drawn, based on the highly visible blind person with a guide dog.

A second explanation comes from television and filmmakers' frequent portrayal of blind persons with a guide dog, and the impression that this creates with the public. An example of this is the television series, "Longstreet," which featured the blind man's amazing guide dog.

A third explanation comes from newspaper and media coverage given service

clubs who contribute guide dogs to blind persons. This tends to over-emphasize the number of dogs used by the blind.

Still another explanation stems from the fact that in Utah, as well as other mountain states, there is probably a considerably higher percentage of blind persons using guide dogs than in most other parts of the country. This is due to a number of factors: 1) Prior to 1965, and for a few years after when the position went unfilled, there was no Mobility instructor for the adult blind in the state. Even now, the instructor has had to somewhat limit himself geographically to those persons living in or near Salt Lake City, where the state's rehabilitation center is located; 2) it was not until 1967 that there was a trained, full time instructor of Orientation and Mobility for blind students attending the School for the Blind in Utah; and 3) until the fall of 1978, the state did not have one trained Mobility instructor to teach blind students attending public elementary, junior high, or high school. (One instructor is now employed in the Granite district.) Thus, many blind youth and adults in the state have had to either stay home and restrict their travel, get around the best they can without proper travel training, or get a dog and hope that it would solve their travel needs. Many have restored to this last option, both in Utah and in other areas of the Mountain West.

The history of the use of dogs as guides for blind people is an interesting one. Following a visit to a German school where she saw shepherds being trained for blinded veterans of World War I, Dorothy Harrison Eustis was moved. She wrote an article for the Saturday Evening Post which appeared November 5, 1927 describing the training for the dogs. A few weeks later, Morris Frank of Tennessee learned of the article and wrote to Mrs. Eustis, who was living in Switzerland at the time. Frank begged her to allow him to be trained, then to return to America with his dog so he could "show people here how a blind man can be absolutely on his own."

Morris Frank did just that, along with his dog, "Buddy". Mrs. Eustis returned to

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the U.S., and with her help, the Seeing Eye was established, with its first class in Nashville in February 1929. A few years later the Seeing Eye, Inc. moved to Morristown, New Jersey, where it is presently located, and has trained over 7300 dogs for blind persons.

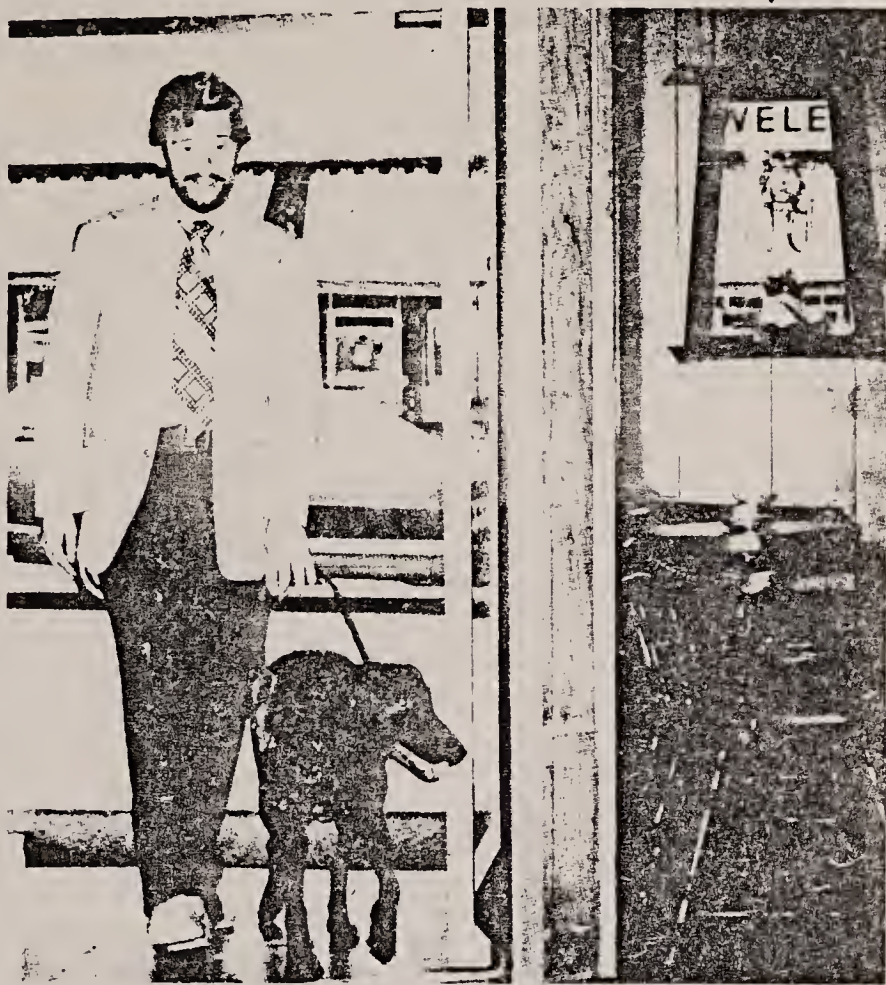
Other schools were subsequently established for the breeding and training of dogs for the blind. Leader Dogs for the Blind, Inc., was founded in 1939 in Rochester, Michigan, and Guide Dogs for the Blind, Inc., was formed in San Rafael, California in 1942. In 1948 Pilot Dogs, Inc. was established in Columbus, Ohio, and in 1954 Guiding Eyes for the Blind, Inc. was organized in New York City. By 1955 there were 9 guide dog schools in the United States and the territory of Hawaii. Currently, there are eight schools.

Not all copy machines are made by Xerox, and it is incorrect to say that you are going to "Xerox" something. Similarly, not all guide dogs are "Seeing Eye" dogs, and it is mistaken to say that you just saw a "Seeing Eye" dog, unless, in fact, it was from the Seeing Eye, Inc. The signs on the doors of all post office buildings in this country, therefore, are incorrect when they read, "No pets allowed, except Seeing Eye dogs." The correct term, of course, should be "guide dogs."

Some schools have worked with as many as 30 different breeds of dogs, but most have limited this down to 3 or 4: the German shepherd, the Labrador retriever, and the golden retriever. In many schools, the German shepherd is the main dog used. One of the schools' most important responsibilities is to carefully match the blind client with a dog of an appropriate size, stature, and temperament. It would be inappropriate to pair a short, older blind person who has less demanding travel needs with a tall, energetic dog who requires a lot of energy release.

The transient, more leisure-minded, and

modernized nature of society the last numbers of years has greatly changed the type and temperament of dogs needed over that required in the 1940's and 50's. Blind per-



Mr. David Loux of Seeing Eye, Inc.

sons often obtain jobs now where their guide dogs are required to sit quietly by a desk all day. The number of blind children and youth is decreasing, while the number of elderly blind persons is vastly increasing. Therefore, the trend is generally toward shorter dogs, with mild, calm temperaments. The dogs must be bred for tough pads on their feet for continuous walking on hard pavement and sidewalks. Also, the dogs must be adaptable to different environments, and be able to handle relocations.

Many schools train their dogs for 3-4 months, beginning at about age 14 month. The dogs are then matched with a blind user, who will receive training with the dog at the school and in the community for about 4 weeks. Several schools provide the dogs to blind persons at no cost, or have Lions Clubs in the person's home area finance the dog. The Seeing Eye, Inc. re-



quires that the blind person pay for the dog himself (even if it is done on time payments), with the intent that it will encourage him to better appreciate, use and care for the dog.

In conclusion, there are several factors and guide dog school policies to keep in mind when considering a dog as means of mobility. Listed below are a few:

1. Most guide dog schools will not give a dog to anyone under the age of 17, since the dog needs to be fed, bathed, and cared for by its user, not a parent. Also, the dog needs to be a working dog, not a pet, or a point of attraction in a school.

2. Many schools do not like to issue dogs to very many persons over age 55. These persons often are retired, stay home, and do not travel much; when they do go out, they often walk quite slowly. A guide dog needs to travel daily, and walk at least 4-5 miles an hour to stay on task and in training. It is well to remember that the majority of blind people are elderly.

3. Schools do not like to accept persons with any useful vision. If a person is partially sighted and has residual vision, he will rely on it rather than the dog, and the dog will not react as it has been trained.

4. Guide dog schools do not generally like to match dogs with persons with diabetes, since a diabetic's vision fluctuates so radically. One week his vision may be good, and will lead the dog around an obstacle or low branch. The next week his vitreous may be filled with blood or his retina will have new scars, and his vision will be poor. As he runs into low branch, he will discipline the dog, and the dog will be confused; the dog is unsure of his role and is out of training. Again, it is well to bear in mind that diabetes is the leading cause of new blindness. This policy by many schools affects numerous blind persons.

5. It takes more money to feed and care for a dog than it does a cane. It is difficult for many handicapped persons to secure a well-paying job. Visually impaired persons often live on a low income, and it is well to consider the costs of maintaining a dog. Many rehabilitation counselors point out to their blind clients that it costs about as much to feed a large dog as it does to feed a person.

6. A guide dog is not a magic ticket to getting around. A dog does not know

on his own when a traffic light has changed. So far as is known, dogs are color blind. Dogs do not watch the traffic lights. The dog responds to commands by the blind person. The blind person must be well-oriented to his community, and be able to correctly interpret traffic in order to direct the dog and give him commands.

7. A potential employer, already uneasy about hiring a handicapped person, may be further concerned about where the dog will be taken to relieve himself, and the time it will take throughout the day to do this. He may also exhibit hesitations about attitudes of other workers towards the dog, and reactions by customers.

8. As mentioned earlier, a blind person with a dog is readily identified as a "blind person", and is highly visible to the public. Many visually impaired persons wish to avoid identification and the silent labeling that often takes place by society.

9. On the positive side, a guide dog helps the traveler walk much faster. It is almost startling to note the marked, increased travel pace when first using a dog.

10. Using a guide dog adds a valuable safety factor generally not available when using a cane as a means of mobility. A dog will usually guide the blind person around unscheduled obstacles and hazards, as well as protecting him from overhead signs and branches.

11. A guide dog offers the intangible and immeasurable benefit of companionship. The love that often develops between master and dog, through both working relationships and also companionship at home is very strong.

Finally, it might be noted that Mr. David Loux, the field representative for the Seeing Eye, Inc., and the man pictured in this article, will be visiting the Utah School for the Blind in the Spring of 1979. He will explain Seeing Eye's program and policies, and further explain the use of guide dogs.

— Bryan Gerritsen,
Orientation and Mobility Specialist

Cats

I like cats. They are lots of fun. They are colorful and nice to play with. My cats like to be with me. I have nine cats. Their names are: Danny, Cowboy, Tiger, Rocky, Hilly, Mittens, Muffin and Gray Girl. I love my cats very much and they love me.

— Laurie Lewis

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